Interview with McKinney Russell

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MCKINNEY RUSSELL

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: This is May 10, 1997 at the home of McKinney Russell. I am going to ask McKinney to start out by giving us a short statement on where he came from, when and where he was born, and where he was before he came to Washington, and then he will take it from there.

RUSSELL: In brief, this is my background. I was born in May 1929 in New York City. My father was a newspaper man for the Brooklyn Eagle, who had come north from Florida just a few months before I was born. My mother was also a southerner from Atlanta. I grew up in New York City. My father worked for the paper right through the Depression. I went to public schools in Brooklyn and went to Midwood High School in the class of 1946, and spent those four years of high school during the Second World War, a fairly formative period in my own life. I was the oldest of the four children. I have a brother and sisters — twins, three years younger — and a younger brother who is 11 years younger.

The four of us grew up in Brooklyn in the '30s during a relatively carefree and happy time for us as a family. No particular problem during the Depression and living in New York City was a big adventure during those times. Security was not a problem. You could go anywhere on the subway and somehow feel secure with Fiorello La Guardia as the Mayor.

In 1946, I had the choice of three colleges, Yale Harvard and Dartmouth. I picked Yale and joined the class of 1950 in September of 1946. I spent four years as an undergraduate at the Yale College and, in part because of the influence of the events of the Second World War, in part because I had found in high school that I had a good ear for foreign languages, I decided to major in Russian area studies. I learned Russian fairly well during the three years of intensive study as an undergraduate, and realized rather quickly that the expectations many of us had had that the United States and the Soviet Union would be allies and friends forever, as they had been during the War, were not to be realized.

When I graduated on June 12 of 1950, it was only 13 days later that very obvious violent proof was given that we and the Soviet Union were not going to get along, when the invasion by North Korea of South Korea launched that war. I had made no particular plans for any graduate study or a career and not too many months went by before I received a letter from President Truman inviting me to join the Armed Forces and do my two years of duty as an enlisted man. After doing a range of different jobs, translation work, odds and ends, just to keep active during the fall of 1950, I was inducted into the U.S. Army in March 1951. I did my two years and most of the period that I was in the Army I spent in the Army of Occupation in West Germany in and around the Frankfurt area. I arrived in Germany on a troop ship with 3000 other GIs on the first of January 1952, following basic training and some specialized training.

On the troopship I had a moderately interesting experience. I didn't know any German at the time. Among my shipmates was a young Swiss who had been sent by his company, Swissair, to work for them in New York City. His company and he had been careless enough not to realize that, as a resident alien, he was subject at that time to the draft of the U.S. Government, and here was a young Swiss who was actually drafted against his will into the U.S. Army. Why he had let himself fall into that situation, or put up with it, I don't know, but he was an entirely disillusioned young man. Somehow or other, we struck an acquaintance and he said, “Well, I'll pass the time until I get back to Europe and teach

you German.” So every day, we walked on the deck and he taught me the basics of the language.

It didn't help very much though, because nobody on the troop train from Bremerhaven to Bavaria, including me, knew much of the language. I recall that, as the train went south, there was a big sign at every railway station that said, “Ausgang”, and we were naively surprised that the German towns seemed to have the same name. It was only after about 3 or 4 stops that we realized that “Ausgang” was the German word for “exit” and all of the stations of course had quite different names. During the 15 months I was in the Army in Germany, I learned German fairly thoroughly and had a quite active personal social life.

Q: Did you study German? I mean, you never had a formal study...just picking it up and from talking to people...?

RUSSELL: Never had any formal study. I picked up quite a lot and found that the experience of living and working there was a stimulating one. I had learned French tolerably well in high school and knew Russian well, and when an opportunity came my way to be discharged from the Army in Europe rather than return to the States directly, I took a job that began as soon as I left the Army in March 1953.

For two years it took me to a western German city called Kaiserslautern. During those years of the '50s there was a steady stream of refugees and escapees, Soviet citizens disillusioned with their own country who had an opportunity to reach the West, mostly through Berlin. Many of them were Soviet troops from East Germany. These are years before the building of the Berlin wall, and if a Soviet soldier were able to get civilian clothes and reach East Berlin, it was no particular trick to escape into the Western sectors by subway. The U.S. authorities interested in finding out exactly what was going on in East Germany would spend a month or so interrogating these escapees, but they were not going to go anywhere as emigrants, having just come out, and they were bound to spend at least several years in Germany before they would have such a chance.

A non-governmental organization, with funding from the United States Government under the Presidential Escapee Program, with the rather grand name of American Friends of Russian Freedom, had established a residence, a very simple kind of barracks reception center for about 30 such people in Kaiserslautern. At that time there was a major NATO build-up and consequently there were lots of jobs for drivers, plumbers, electricians and security guards, and so on. As Center Director I was in charge of finding jobs for the escapees and running the Center, a rather challenging job because I was still younger than most of the people I was responsible for.

Q: Was this a paid job?

RUSSELL: Those were paid jobs but the pay in those days was not very high. The salaries for social workers are never particularly high, but I recall that my yearly salary when I began working in Kaiserslautern was $3,750 a year, which was enough for a young single fellow to live on, but was not very high on the hog. It was a very important and formative period in my life because every few weeks there were new arrivals of refugee Soviets, including some from Central Asia. They would arrive speaking barely any German, and it was my job, through the German Labor Office, to persuade the Germans to give them a reference to the American office that was hiring for the U.S. Forces build-up.

It turned out to be a very tough job. There were some rowdies and drunks among the Russians who were very hard to manage. Looking back on this experience, I have to say that it was a particularly important period in my life. As I learned to take responsibility and a leadership role and get things accomplished for my charges, I did some serious growing up. I also had to learn German intensively, and by the time I left, both my German and my Russian were very useful and had been learned quite thoroughly.

For several years I had had my eye on the U.S. radio stations operating in Munich. The public story in those years was that funding for the two stations came from private contributions by Americans to make it possible for Radio Free Europe to broadcast

to five countries in Eastern Europe, that is, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, at the same time that Radio Liberty broadcast from different studios in about fifteen languages of the Soviet Union, principally Russian, of course, but also Ukrainian, Belorussian, Tatar-Bashkir, Georgian, Uzbek, and so on.

In the spring of 1955, a job as Head of Translation at Radio Liberty opened. I was accepted for it and moved to Munich in my old green Opel car in April 1955. Of course, both stations were funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, although no one told me that for 3 or 4 years. The people ultimately in charge, very few of whom knew any Russian, had no idea of what the broadcasts were actually saying. Thus a number of translations had to be made for their benefit of parts of the program every day. Since the translators were all non-native English speakers, the head of the translation section had to do the editing to make sure that the results actually roughly approximated the English language.

I had that job for about 6 or 7 months and then progressively moved up within the organization until I left it in October 1962. I became Special Events Correspondent, then Chief Correspondent, then Deputy Head of News. It proved to be a very interesting professional life, calling for a good deal of travel in Europe. I was often in Brussels or Paris and made half a dozen reporting trips to Scandinavia. The point was to inform listeners in the Soviet Union through feature programs which were then translated into Russian and the other languages. We reported on how free trade unions work in Western Europe; what the living conditions were for people in Finland right next to the Soviet Union; how Swedish elections took place in the glare of sharp competition between competing parties, the overall idea being to provide an alternative picture of what life could be in free countries, and not only in the United States. There were broadcasters from New York and Washington, but the radio station broadcast, as did Radio Free Europe, not as an American station like VOA but as voices of their own peoples.

In 1959, I was on home leave from Munich and had the opportunity of covering the two-week trip to the United States by the then leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev.

I traveled with him from Washington to New York, and to the West Coast, up to San Francisco, to the farm in Iowa, and so on. The principal long-term event in my life during those years was meeting the woman whom I married and to whom I have been married ever since. In February of 1957, after I had been in Munich almost 2 years, I met at a dinner party with colleagues from the Radio Liberty, a young woman of French culture, Italian citizenship, and great charm. She had grown up in Tunisia and was visiting friends in Munich. Her name was Stella Boccara. We decided rather quickly that we went very well together and were married not too long thereafter. Our first son McKinney Junior, was born in 1959, in Munich, and our second child, daughter, Valerie, was born in 1961, also in Munich.

Now I had taken Foreign Service Exam for the Department of State in August 1959 at the Consulate in Frankfurt, passed it, and was offered an appointment in the Department of State in the spring of 1960. Having developed a certain professional skill in journalism, and having an interest in the information/cultural side of things, I decided against taking that State Department offer and try my luck with USIA instead. In 1961 on home leave in the States, I took the oral test that was given at that time by USIA before a panel of three USIA Foreign Service Officers. There was no written exam, but the oral exam went well, and after completion of security clearance and so on, in the summer of 1962 I was offered appointment as a Class 5 Officer in USIA, the equivalent of FSO 3 these days. This, of course, meant leaving Munich and coming back to Washington for training. At that time, Stella and I had two small children, one one-year old, and the other three.

At the time that the letter of invitation came from USIA, there was a note of urgency in the message to the effect that there was a very specific and important job that USIA had already identified which they wanted me to fill. Naively, as it turned out, since I had spent at that time since January 1952—in other words, near 10-1/2 years or so in Europe, and had perfected a knowledge of Russian, German and French, and learned Polish along the

way, and passable Swedish—I was pretty sure that the job they had in mind was a grand, important job in Eastern Europe.

I was sworn in to the Agency at 9 a.m. on October 15, 1962. At 9:10 that same morning, I got my assignment to go as Assistant Information Officer to Leopoldville. Leopoldville, now known as the city of Kinshasa, was the capital of a country then called the ex-Belgian Congo, later as the Congo, then as Zaire, and now once again Congo. People who recall those years know well that after Independence was given to the Congo in June 960, there has been a period of great internal upheaval , uncertainty about who was in charge, assassinations, tribal uprisings. It was a particularly dangerous time and a time when there was a great deal of world concern about Africa. Events in the Congo took several serious negative turns during 1961 and 1962.

Q: ...and we were evacuating, I think, a number of Americans and also people of other nations, by military craft about that time, weren't they?

RUSSELL: That evacuation effort was the serious and bloody event that came later in November 1964 when there was hostage-taking in the town called Stanleyville, now known as Kisangani. At that time, the Americans, the British and the Belgians collaborated to send in planes to evacuate some 300 hostages.

When my family and I arrived in the Congo in early 1963, the situation was already one of great uncertainly and disorder. As a first assignment in USIA, it turned out to be one that offered a broad range of experience in new circumstances. I should mention before going on that the entry into the White House in 1961 by John F. Kennedy and his designation of Edward R. Murrow as the Director of USIA were both important factors in leading me to want to work in the Agency.

That first assignment involved working with Congolese media that had just gained independence and the ability to write what they wanted after 70 years of colonialism, so it

was a heady and interesting stuff. They were very inexperienced. One had the opportunity to assist them to develop journalistic skills and they were appreciative of that.

For reasons that I don't now recall, perhaps because of better transportation links and perhaps because the Congo was not a former French colony, the USIS post in Leopoldville at the time was the producer of a monthly magazine in the form of a tabloid newspaper 16 to 20 pages long, which was called “American Perspectives”. It was published in 105,000 copies edited and printed in Leopoldville and then shipped by air to all of the French-speaking countries in Africa: Senegal, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Gabon, etc. I had had very little experience with the print media, although I knew radio quite well at the time I came into the Agency.

I recall that 2 days after my arrival the other Assistant Information Officer, a man named Don Miller, was first to return to the States because of illness or death in his family. He was the editor of the American Perspectives. When he left, the Information Officer informed me the same day that I had just become Acting Editor of the magazine. This was the time when I didn't yet know that you could take a photograph and make it a different size when you printed it. I recall being distinctly daunted and wondering how I had ever gotten into this business when I looked at a big 8” x 11” photograph and I only had a space 2” x 4” in which to print it. But you learn quickly in USIA and for the time that my colleague was away, I was editor of the American Perspectives and later contributed to it and wrote for it in the course of the next 2 years.A demanding element of my tenure in the Congo was representing U.S. A.I.D. and explaining American assistance to the Congolese through working with the press. This was not always easy. For example, the corn that we sent as food aid was the kind of yellow corn that we grow and consume in this country. The corn that the Congolese were used to eating was a white variety, and there was a lot of resistance to consuming the food that was sent by the U.S. under Food for Peace.

They were interesting years because of the uncertainty and the feeling that what one did seemed was very important. One imagined that it made a real difference. Here was

this enormous country, the wealthiest in the continent, falling apart and in the news all the time. At the time in November 1964 when the hostages were taken by rebels in the Eastern Congo, in Stanleyville, I was the acting spokesman for the Embassy and learned a lot very fast about talking to the press, either talking to the press or not, and what to say or not to say. It was a very interesting and demanding time because, of course, the fact that the United States had provided the planes to fly in Belgian paratroopers from British Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, only a few years after Congolese independence, created very serious problems for the United States and the other two countries in public affairs terms.

Here was a new independent African nation, and the United States led by John Kennedy, collaborating with the former colonial powers to fly right into the middle of Africa and shoot the place up. Stanleyville was in a real sense the heart of Africa. It was the very part of the Congo about which Joseph Conrad had written his novel, “Heart of Darkness.” For USIS and for me, there was one memorable event in the wake of the fly-in by the American planes to free the hostages in Stanleyville.

The Congolese Government, and particularly the United States Embassy and the American Administration, felt an urgent need to publish something to explain and justify the action. The decision was taken by the PAO, a rather famous PAO in USIA history named John Mowinckel, to produce a so-called White Paper about the event. It would be written in English and in French with photographs, and would be distributed widely around the continent in both languages.

I was given the job in writing and editing and publishing that White Paper. It was a very interesting effort. We managed to get the text written and translated, and the photographs inserted, all in about 6 days time. The West German government had set up a printing press and was supporting the daily newspaper in Kinshasa. We worked out a quick deal with them for them to print it and we had something like 100,000 or more copies of the

White Paper produced within less than a week. It was an exciting exercise and may have done some good.

I had met the Area Director for Africa, at that time Mark Lewis, on a trip he took to Leopoldville some time in 1964. When we left the Congo, I was assigned to go as cultural attach# to Warsaw. The end of our tour in the Congo was a rather tense and difficult time because my wife had to leave early in order to give birth to our third child, Kyle, who was born in Lyon, France, where her parents then lived. Her departure with the two small children with me behind in the Congo was a period of considerable stress for her and the family. We expected to be going back briefly to the States on home leave, and then going to Warsaw, but this was not to be.Agency leadership at that time was very interested in setting the same kind of management and personnel norms for USIA officers as obtained for State officers. A goal was that USIA officers should be designated Foreign Service Officers without any “R” for Foreign Service Reserve, or “I” for Foreign Service Information Officer, on a level of complete equality. Among other things, the standards for length of time overseas were limited, and at that time in the early spring of 1965 when we left the Congo separately to going to Warsaw, I had been abroad since January 1952, between military service and refugee resettlement and Radio Liberty and the Congo.

This led to the Washington decision, just as I was leaving or just after I had left to join the family in France, that I would not after all be going to Warsaw but was to be reassigned back to the United States. Mark Lewis got in touch with me with some urgency and offered me the position of Policy Officer for the African Area. When we were all back in the States by that spring of 1965, some time like the beginning of May, I became Policy Officer for the African Area of USIA.

This proved to be something of a stretch, inasmuch as the only field experience I had had was in a very atypical part of Africa, namely the rebellious Congo. The African Area at that time was on the fifth or the sixth floor of 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue. This space and several other floors had just recently been taken over and added to the 1776 offices, as

the Agency's role expanded. Mark Lewis was Area Director and Bill Weld was Deputy Area Director. Dave Dubois was Program Coordinator and I was Policy Officer.

It turned out to be a particularly rich assignment because Africa was very much on our minds as a nation and a Foreign Service. The Peace Corps had its first volunteers in many countries in Africa. Interest in Africa was also very high in part because the mid-'60s were a time of surging civil rights activism in the United States. As a result, as Policy Officer, I had a budget of close to three-quarters of a million dollars a year to make films for Africa.

It was an extremely interesting time to work with creative film-makers. At that time, George Stevens, Jr. was head of the Film Service, a man of great creativity. There were some very good film-makers in the Agency, and we had a cadre of documentary film makers with whom we would work on contract.

During my 2 years as Policy Officer, we must have made 8 or 10 documentary films. One dealt with the Peace Corps volunteers in Niger, another was about visits to the United States by statesmen like Senegalese President Leopold Senghor. One spectacular film about the First Festival of Negro Arts held in 1966, in Senegal, was a particular success. The film-maker who made that film was a highly talented black documentary film-maker named William Greaves. He and I have remained friends to this day as a result of our collaboration on that film. Greaves is currently making a lengthy documentary on the life and work of Ralph Bunche, and he was here in Washington this week for the dedication of the library of the Department of State as the Ralph Bunche Library.

In any event, those experiences in the film world were very broadening for me personally, conceiving what a film ought to do, working with the film-maker, and then taking it through the process of rough-cut and fine-cut to see how the film came out in policy terms and artistically. Defining the policy consideration and balancing them against the artistic concerns of the film-maker himself—these were extremely interesting issues.

Now, some of the films that were made later in the '60s and in the early '70s, particularly those relating to the events in Southeast Asia, touched off some very serious differences and controversies. Some of those films were, of course, never even released, as we know. But these were more simple, straightforward days, and I recall them with a great deal of satisfaction. I hope very much that those documentaries that we made for Africa in mid-'60s are still in the Agency archives and haven't been lost. I know that Greaves's excellent film about the Festival of Negro Arts is still extant. I saw it 5 or 6 years ago. We also made a film about the Second Festival of Negro Arts in Nigeria, which would have been in perhaps late '67, but it was a good deal less successful a film.

At that time also, in 1966, I was the author of the policy paper that defined the purposes and goals of a new Agency magazine in English and French for Africa. Called “TOPIC”, it was launched in the spring of 1967 and grew and continued until quite recently. Among the things that made its contribution was that TOPIC reported events involving the United States and Africa across the continent. We cross-reported events of interest to Uganda to readers in Cameroon and Togo, for example.At that time, I was also much involved with the VOA broadcasts in English, French, Portuguese, Swahili and Hausa. Altogether, those two years working with Lewis and the others were extremely important formative years in my own development, because I really learned how the Agency worked. I dealt with the publishers, reviewed the Wireless Files, negotiated with the radio broadcasters, and collaborated with film makers.

Q: You gained a very broad perspective on the Agency activities then.

RUSSELL: It was extremely interesting. I recall meeting regularly with other policy officers in 1965, '66, '67. At that time, the Agency Policy Officer was an unusual person named John Pauker whose visiting card, I recall, identified him as John Pauker, Poet and Propagandist. John was an elfin, impish man, who brought together the policy officers from the five Areas every morning, at I think 7:30, in his office, for a conference call with the Voice of America and the Department of State. We had lively discussions about what

was going on around the world, what ought to be said, and various approaches were suggested for the various media. Those were never dull times.

In April 1966, Mark Lewis and I made an extensive trip across Africa, to 10 or 12 countries. I remember each of those stops with a good deal of affection. We spent several days in Addis Ababa when Gene Rosenfeld was PAO; went to Kampala, were briefly in Douala in Cameroon, and spent 3 or 4 days in Lagos where Hunt Damon was Public Affairs Officer. We visited Kenya as well, when a very talented black American journalist from Pittsburgh, whose name doesn't come right to mind, was PAO at the time. We were in Ghana a few months after the fall of Kwame Nkrumah, and then ended for 3 or 4 intensive and interesting days in Dakar, Senegal, when Ted Tanen, one of our really great PAOs, was running the program. It was very informative and helpful to me, after return to Washington, in working with the various media that were providing programming for the field posts we had visited.

The next year, in the spring of 1967, I had an extremely close call of a medical nature. I had gone to the office on a Monday morning early and was troubled by a progressively more insistent pain in the abdomen. By 10 o'clock it was clear that I had something very seriously wrong. I was rushed to the hospital and had a three-hour operation for an inflamed appendix. It was a very close call. I still bless my luck that it happened while I was at 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, and not airborne somewhere over Central Africa.

In the middle of '67, after 2 years in the Africa area office, I was transferred to take over the direction of the VOA broadcasts in the 4 languages of the Soviet Union that the Voice broadcast in at that time, Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Armenian. My earlier experience at Radio Liberty, where I was Deputy News Director when I left, prepared me for this job, as did my knowledge of Russian. Those 2 years were, I have to say, singularly demanding and complicated. There were 120 people in the division which had been, when I arrived, part of the European Division of the VOA. We all felt rather uncomfortable under that umbrella, since the problems we faced were so different, and I began early on

working for the creation of a separate division. After 6 or 8 months, that was successful, and the USSR Division was created.The non-Russian services were much smaller-the Georgian and Armenian services had only 5 or 6 members, the Ukrainian might have had 10-but the Russian had some 85 or 90...they were broadcasting in Russian 17 or 18 hours a day. There was a challenging range of complexities in that job. One, of course, was that of creating interesting programs every day for the audience, and it was an audience with which, at that time, I had never had any contact. I had never been to the Soviet Union when I took over this job in August 1967. I had hoped that soon after the move, say within 6 months, I would make a trip there to gain on the ground some direct sense of the audience. I made that trip in December 1967 to all four of the areas, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia to which we were broadcasting.

The policy issues were very complicated, among other things, because there were political differences within the services, often between people who had divergent backgrounds and saw things very differently. In the Russian Service, for example, there were those who had come out after the 1917 Revolution who were men and women already in their sixties. Then there were those who had remained in the West during or after the War. And there were yet others, most of whom had come out in the 1960s. These different generations had very varied different experiences and perspectives and often they were at loggerheads with each other. There was a lot of mediation and keeping people apart that came with heading up that broadcasting unit at the VOA.

The most striking single event during my tenure was the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. When I joined the VOA, there had been no jamming by Soviet jammers since 1962. It was during the invasion, with the move of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia, that jamming was reinstated and again created the problems of getting through that interference.

The mid-'60s were in general a period of Americanization of the VOA broadcasts to the USSR. My immediate predecessor, Terry Catherman, a particularly energetic and effective

officer, had spent 3 years there, and had made it his policy to bring on many young Americans whose Russian may not have been perfect but who had a much brighter and fresher approach to broadcasting. He had introduced programs of popular music with the disc jockey work being done by young Americans rather than Russian emigres. Terry's predecessor had been a former Soviet general who had defected in 1934 in Athens, a man named Alexander Barmine. He was a very conscientious, very committed broadcaster, but also a very authoritarian figure, and one who did not think that young Americans whose grammar in using the Russian language that was not perfect should be on the air. Well, Catherman had made a new approach stick during his tenure, and I was very pleased to continue in the same track that he had initiated.

I was scheduled to go as Cultural Affairs Officer to Moscow in 1968 after one year in the Voice of America, but that transfer was postponed for a year until 1969. So I had 2 full years in the VOA, and still have friends from that period. There is a special kind of esprit de corps among Voice people that we foreign service officers came to appreciate very much.The standard procedure in those years was that the heads of the various geographic divisions would be foreign service officers. The head of the Near East Asia Area would be someone who had recently served there, and the result was that there was usually a close and cordial personal relationship between the Agency's foreign service and the broadcasters. At the same time, though, in part because of the pressures that built up when broadcasters had been on the job for 10 or 12 years, 15, 18 years and had gained real expertise as broadcasters. Repeatedly there would be a foreign service officer who would move in as head of the division and this was bound to generate resentment.

A policy shift began later that saw civil servants, broadcasters with the VOA, at the head of the various division units. This must have started in the early or mid-'70s. By now it's become standard and there are very few, if any, foreign service officers in positions of broadcasting authority at the VOA. But despite some tensions in those years, it was, I thought, a very positive way of keeping two distinct elements of the Agency talking to and working with each other. John Charles Daly was the head of the VOA at that time, a

serious American broadcaster and well-liked quizmaster, a very open-spirited, energetic man. An old friend from Radio Liberty days, Francis Ronalds, was VOA program manager. It was a very stimulating and interesting place to work, and I have, as I say, very fond memories of it.

I then went to Moscow as CAO, arriving in July 1969, arriving on July 2 to be exact, with my wife and children. The 3 children were, at that time, 10, 8 and 5. As CAO, I held the number two position in a five-officer post. Five officers and two locals made up the full USIS staff at the American Embassy in Moscow in 1969. We were not called USIS but were known as the Press and Cultural Section of the American Embassy, and that was then standard practice in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Arriving on July 2, the first thing that we did that was particularly memorable was to attend the 4th of July events at Spaso House and at the Embassy's dacha. Four or five days later, the Public Affairs Officer, Yale Richmond, left on home leave so that I was Acting PAO within a week after arrival.

Now on the way back to the United States, Yale Richmond joined the then Director of USIA, Frank Shakespeare, and PAOs from Poland, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, for a PAO Conference in Vienna. This was the first time that Frank Shakespeare had met the Public Affairs Officers from Eastern Europe. He had been appointed by President Nixon as Director of USIA in the spring of 1969, and was a particularly activist anti-Communist in his view of the world.

Apparently, as I understand the story several public affairs officers later told me, the Director asked each what he thought would happen if Communist power were to collapse tomorrow in each of their countries. How the other people responded I don't know, but Yale Richmond reportedly said that he assumed that after—at that time it would have been some 50 years after the communists seized power—that many people in the Soviet Union would opt for some kind of socialism and that an immediate shift, a total shift into new political direction, seemed to him to be unlikely. This response reportedly made the Director extremely angry and very critical of Yale, to the extent that he removed him

as Public Affairs Officer in the Soviet Union more or less on the spot. Yale Richmond never went back to Moscow then, and the USIS secretary, Mary Keeny, packed up his family's effects at his apartment and had them shipped back to the U.S.. He went on to an extremely active and effective tenure in the old CU, and is today a recognized expert on East-West exchanges. But in summer 1969, I thus found myself as PAO in the Soviet Union.

By late August Frank Shakespeare had decided that I could hack it, that I was the one he wanted to take the job, which put me rather on the spot, because here I was PAO with only two years of overseas experience in the former Belgian Congo. So, although it was at that time a Class I position, old Class I now corresponding to Minister Counselor, my rank at that time was Class III. I was in a way over my head, and had a lot to learn. At that time, I had had, between working in the Radio Liberty and at the VOA, something like 11 years of experience of working and using the Russian language a great deal, so I was quite at home in it. I was able to get much involved in things Soviet without having to worry about interpreters or major misunderstandings.First of all, I was very interested in supporting the VOA. I set up a system, soon after my arrival, of a monthly reporting and analytical airgram to the VOA in Washington. . In those days, the airgram was used a great deal. It was a message sent by pouch, not by telegram, and, in order to give the Voice of America broadcasters a sense of what was going on, what people were talking about, what might be interesting to them, my staff and I wrote every month a detailed airgram telling them what seemed to be on people's minds and trying to reflect the atmospherics of life in the Soviet Union. We also let the broadcasters know what their audibility was—we set up a system of having travelers to other parts of the country take along a VOA radio on loan and try to tune in and report back to us on whether or not they had been able to listen to VOA.

Q: Were you able to travel quite freely at that time, or were you quite restricted?

RUSSELL: It was always a problem to travel at that time, but what made it necessary for us to travel was a rather interesting circumstance. In return for our agreeing in the original cultural agreement signed, I believe, in 1958 with the Soviet Union, to allow a very limited number of Soviet scholars to come to the United States on an exchange basis, a whole cultural agreement was developed under which there was also a system of national exhibitions. The Soviets would do an exhibition on some aspect of life there that they would send to us, and we in return, i.e., USIA, would mount one and send it to them. Our society, at that time as now, was a completely open one, but theirs unlike the present, was still tightly closed. Naturally, the impact of these national exhibits was far greater in their country than in ours. Our exhibit on education, for example, was shown in 1970 in the city of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, which had never seen an exhibit of any kind about anything in the United States. Its popularity was enormous. The arrangement was that an exhibit would be in the country for one year; it would go to 6 cities for about a month in each city and then take a month to pack up and move on by train to the next city.

Just before I arrived in July of 1969, a new American exhibit on our educational system had opened in Leningrad. The first time that I left Moscow was 3 or 4 weeks after arrival to take the measure of this important show. There were serious problems with it, including inadequate coverage of certain aspects of education, not very lively exhibits, in fact, a whole range of problems. The exhibit was to move on to Moscow in September and everyone wanted it to be as successful as possible in the capital. I recall writing a lengthy and detailed critique back to the Agency describing what was lacking or wrong as I saw it, along with comments from Soviet visitors and from the young American guides at the exhibit. The Agency responded very quickly and by the time the exhibit opened in Moscow, a number of improvements had been made.The guides in these exhibits had learned Russian or knew it from the families. They were, of course, the stars of the show, because they would spend 7 or 8 hours a day talking to audiences and explaining, for example, how one got into a university or how public schools worked in the United States. There were 25 or so guides, young men and women and they took advantage of a very interesting

opportunity to participate in the exhibits and gain unique access to Soviet citizens who came to the exhibit. It was unquestionably one of the best things that the Agency was ever involved in doing, because the long-range impact on the minds of the young Soviet citizens was very great and lasting.

The guides and staffs of the exhibits helped make an enormous difference, and many of them have now gone on to many kinds of other things. Jack Harrod was with one of the exhibits, perhaps the education one, and retired recently as Western Europe Area Director. There is a marvelous broadcaster at the Voice of America named Mary Patzer, whose Russian was virtually native, who got her start as an exhibit guide back in the '60s. In any case, the fact that this exhibit, besides going to St. Petersburg and Moscow, went to Ukraine, to Kiev, Baku in Azerbaijan; went to Tashkent in Uzbekistan, and also scheduled to go to Novosibirsk out in Siberia... six altogether interesting cities.

This meant that the USIS staff, which was called Press and Cultural, had to do the advance work, negotiate with the local Chambers of Commerce, agree on a site, to install the exhibit. It was extremely labor-intensive to do that and demanded a lot of effort. I made 2 or 3 trips to Tashkent by air, 4 or 5 hours from Moscow, or maybe more, to set the exhibit up there for its opening for instance. I recall being scheduled to go to Baku to open the exhibit there, and having prepared a short speech in the local language, which I was never able to give because the plane, it being deepest winter, was never able to take off. I recall that my wife and I spent over 24 hours at one of the airports outside Moscow waiting for the departure of the plane to Baku that never left.

Q: I have one question in that regard. The young people who were handling the exhibits up to that point had studied Russian, but these exhibits in other locations required the knowledge of other local languages...for example, Ukrainian, and so forth. Did you have young people who were also sufficiently fluent in these other languages to handle the question and answers involved, in showing the exhibits in these varied places?

RUSSELL: I don't think any exhibit we sent went to Ukraine without having Ukrainian speakers, though there were fewer of them than Russian speakers. There may have been Armenian speakers in those that went to that republic, but the principal effort was that, since Russian was understandable everywhere and we were going to have exhibits going to 6 cities and 3 of them were inside Russia, the guides would need a good command of Russian.

There is one interesting political event connected with the opening of the education exhibit in Novosibirsk, in Central Siberia. In May of 1970, when the exhibit was supposed to open, everything was all set and was going to be opened on, as I recall, May 9. A very significant group of people were coming from the United States, fascinated by this rare opportunity to go to Siberia. Frank Shakespeare himself was coming; William F. Buckley, who was then a member of the USIA Advisory Commission at the time was coming. There may have been a few Republican members of the Congress that were planning to come. They were all set to leave to go to Moscow around May 4 or 5 and go on to Novosibirsk and to be there for the opening of this American Education Exhibit.

Two or three days before they were to leave, I received a call very early in the morning from the Foreign Ministry to tell me that the Exhibit could not under any circumstances open on the intended day because there was a shortage of electricity in Novosibirsk. The exhibit used very little electricity, in fact, and the whole story was completely invented, but there was no room for discussion. The exhibit would not open and it would not be open until some time later when the electrical system would be fixed again. As a consequence, all of the visits by the VIPs coming from Washington had to be canceled.

It was only several days later that we realized what it was that had happened to cause the cancellation, or the postponement rather, because the exhibit did open a week later. That was the precise time, May 1970, when the incursion into the Parrot's Beak Region in Cambodia had been ordered by President Nixon and had touched off a tremendous storm of reaction and criticism in the Communist world. At a time when the propaganda

criticism of the United States over this decision was so intensive the Soviets decided that it would look very bad to have Frank Shakespeare and William F. Buckley and other representatives of the American Administration wandering around, being seen, and reported on in Novosibirsk. It was a kind of a lesson to all of us that the reason that people give for something happening can often be far from the reason. It had nothing to do with the electricity. The faulty generator in Novosibirsk was all in Southeast Asia.

In those days our problems in Moscow were much affected by the problems and challenges of dealing with the Soviet authorities. The Foreign Ministry's Cultural Section, the Ministry of Higher Education, these organizations' people were extremely hard characters to negotiate with because they all had political agendas of their own to limit access and the ability of American cultural diplomats like us to what was going on in the country or influence attitudes there. We had all kinds of complex negotiations about these national exhibits. They would check the list of all of the books in the library that had come in, for example, and if in one of those books there was critical comment about Karl Marx, say, that book had to be withdrawn, not burned, but not put on the shelf.

There were politics everywhere, and it was rather exhausting. On the other hand, every time that you gained some fresh insight into what was going on in that society, it gave a special satisfaction that you had learned something that you didn't know before, something that was worth knowing and reporting. I found during those years we did a great deal of cultural-political reporting and received even, I recall, a commendation from the Department of State for the quality of the reporting on the cultural activities that we produced.

Marlin Remick was my Deputy at the time, a stalwart, first-rate negotiator with the Russians, and very helpful. Our Cultural Affairs Officer was Harry Gilmore, a State Officer on loan to USIA, who was later Ambassador in Armenia and is now the head of the Senior Seminar at the Foreign Service Institute. I recall that relations with the Embassy were very

close because USIS, called the Press and Cultural Section, was very much part of the Embassy structure and one was treated on a par with other sections.

Working at this period in Moscow, when access to the society was so limited and policed so rigorously, U.S. correspondents and the Embassy worked quite close together. Every Friday afternoon, the Ambassador would meet in his office in an unclassified way simply to exchange impressions and ideas with the resident American press corps. We entertained each other a lot and became good friends during those years. For example, the New York Times correspondent at the time was Bernard Gwertzman who is now the foreign editor of the Times. A Time Magazine reporter was Stan Cloud, now an author and senior editor of the Time Magazine.Within the Embassy, most officers were people of very high calibre. The recent Ambassador in China, Stapleton Roy was in the Political Section; Mark Palmer, Thomas Niles, William Farrell, Bill Maynes-these were some of the well known names in the diplomatic world who were all in Moscow at that time. It was an important place to be.

In 1971, I had expected to spend the third year in Moscow, and was hoping perhaps even to get a fourth. In spring of that year, however, there was a major shift in Personnel decided by the Director, still Frank Shakespeare. As a result, 25 senior personnel changes all announced the same day, April Fools Day, 1971. The wireless file announced an enormous shakeup worldwide, and among other things that happened was that Gordon Ewing, who was Public Affairs Officer in Bonn at the time, whose political views apparently did not fit those of Shakespeare, was to be replaced. He felt that it was extremely important to get someone in Bonn who knew Communism and had experience in Eastern Europe. Thus it was that my friendly Economic Counselor colleague, who had seen the wireless file before I did called early to say, “Congratulations. You're PAO in Germany”. I said, “That can't be...” but yet it was.

That is how we left Moscow after just a little over 2 years in July 1971. One interesting thing that happened towards the end of that tour was a farewell kick in the pants from the KGB. They, of course, had obviously kept a file of all of my doings and where I went, since

they had a file on everybody. The fact that I was transferred out by the U.S. Government before they had a chance to use their dossier, which contained all sorts of information about where I had gone and people in the press, theater and the dance world and music, and so on, with whom I had had contact, must have riled them. On May 5, 1971, a month after the announcement of my departure, a weekly newspaper called the Literary Gazette published a full-page denunciation of all of my activities as a would-be subverter of the Soviet intelligentsia, listing many activities and contacts we had had.

Q: You did get into the country later on, didn't you?

RUSSELL: I got back into the country without difficulty but not for many years. I next spent '71 to '75 in Bonn as PAO, and never was reassigned back to the Soviet Union. There is one Agency officer who has that distinction. Ray Benson was PAO for 3 or 4 years, came out and went back again...altogether he was in charge of USIS for 7 or 8 years. He gained a very fine reputation for his work there

As for the Bonn assignment, it presented some real and complex challenges, very different from situation in Moscow. I had had 4 officers and 2 locals in the Soviet Union. In Bonn, at that time, the total American officer contingent was 31 or 32 and there were something over 200 German local employees. In a sense USIS had been invented after WWII in Germany and Japan. In both places, the American effort at re-education and engaging many USIA officers in seminal cultural and information roles, meant that a very high percentage of USIA officers served in Germany or Japan, especially in Germany.

For me, it was a big jump to take over the German program. The four years there were rather heavy going in two areas: politics and post structure. There had been enormous agency and government investments in Germany starting in 1945. We had major America House presence in 1971 in Germany, in West Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, Cologne, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, in addition to which we had America Houses which were called German-America Institutes, headed by Americans but with German staff, and a lot

of German funding in Nuremberg, Heidelberg, Tuebingen, Freiburg, and Saarbrucken. It was a genuine challenge to manage that large an operation because of all of these presences all over the country, in America Houses, and attached to the Consulates General. There were at least two Americans in the main cities and in Frankfurt there were three.

It was extremely difficult to run the country from the Bonn office because the staff there was so small. We were perhaps six or seven people at the start. There was the Country Cultural Affairs Officer, Michael Weyl, the Country Information Officer, Victor Olason, and only a few others. It seemed to me and to European Area Director Jay Gildner, an activist, energetic officer who had opened the America House in Berlin back in 1959, that in those cities where we had big America Houses, we could profitably move the Branch PAO out of the Consulate General and into our own USIS presence, the America House. Where we had two officers, we reduced the USIS officer presence to one, and we moved positions to Bonn to create a new Program Division there that did programming for the whole country. The effort was to create a coherent program so that the informational messages and the cultural activities had something coherent to do with each other. Until then, each of the big America Houses acted much like an independent fiefdom.

Strengthening the country post in this way wasn't easy and it created a great deal of difficulty with the Consuls General. Traditionally, the people who headed those big districts, Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart, Hamburg, etc., were Class I, that is to say, MC, Minister-Counselor, level officers from the State Department who, under other circumstances, might have been Ambassadors and so they thought of themselves to some extent as Ambassadors. When this reorganization was proposed, it came up against a great deal of opposition from them. I learned one thing in this process that I believe is fundamental to being an effective PAO, and that is how vital it is to get the Ambassador and the DCM on your side and keep them there.

As this whole process was going forward, I made a special point of making sure that the DCM, Frank Cash, and the Ambassador, Martin Hillenbrand, knew exactly what I was doing and why, so that they would be supportive when blistering telegrams would come in from the Consul General in Munich, for instance, saying, “You can't do this to me! We represent the U.S. in Bavaria!” The shifts resulted in a lot of changes. We reorganized our office space in Bonn to accommodate additional officers. We saved a great deal of money by getting out of the Consulates General because inside them we had been paying very high rents indeed. We had had a Branch PAO, a secretary and two or three locals sitting in the Consulate General in Munich, for example. By putting them into our own America House, which was a very large and comfortable building, we saved ourselves a great deal of money and we used that money to set things up in Bonn. Those four years were full of tensions and questionings and changes. It was altogether the toughest job that I had yet in the Agency.

Q: What do you think was the major addition to economic savings, or the major results of the shift? What did it do for the program?

RUSSELL: I think it made the program a great deal stronger because we could now plan programs for the various component elements of the program centrally, in the way that got the best out of the speakers and other resources. We could make sure that the major issues that related to German-American relations were centrally formulated clearly and reflected what one could learn at the Embassy which one couldn't learn at the Consulate General because of the direct line that Bonn had back to Washington.

In making these changes, we made a number of mistakes. We believed that the creation of an open, large Area Office for USIS in the Bonn Embassy was a good idea. It turned out to be a bad idea. It didn't take into account traditional ways the German staff had worked and it wasn't very well executed. Originally, when we knocked down a number of walls and planned to make partitions, the designer whom we hired, an American, came up with an idea of suspending materials very much like mattresses from the ceiling, which proved to

be a perfectly rotten idea. We left the mattresses suspended from the ceiling, for about two days, saw it didn't work at all, and pulled them all down, disposed of them, and did more traditional partitioning instead. I understand that since then, some of those offices that had partitioning walls have been rebuilt because, as you know, succeeding PAOs often see things quite differently.

The politics were very important at the time because this was the early '70s when the German Government was developing a new set of political initiatives towards Eastern Europe, and particularly towards East Germany. It was very important that we know what was going on and that American perspectives were clearly heard and published in the country. We had a large political and cultural AMPART program of speakers in the America Houses and in the German-American Institutes.

One of the things about those years that particularly come to mind is that, because Germany had been such a large program for so long, a lot of people back in Washington, at State and in USIA, felt it had to be cut, that there had to be a way to reduce our presences there. During the four years I was in there, from the middle of '71 until the middle of '75, we had a double grand slam of inspections generated in part by this belief. . We had two full-scale Agency inspections, two full-scale State inspections, two Inspector General visits, and two inspections as I recall by the OPM (Office of Personnel Management). It was a constant period of people coming in and pulling things out of the ground to see if they were growing and working. I still remember the Agency inspection team with Gordon Winkler on it. The evening he arrived and came around for a drink at my place, the first words that came out of his mouth were, “OK, Russ. Which post do we close?” He had come to decide: This has got to go; that has got to go.

There were serious questions raised by a lot of people back in Washington about these proposed cuts, and I was very glad to have an extremely effective and supportive Area Director at that time. But there was a fair amount of blood spilled, a lot of questioning about the whole approach. I think that out of it came a much stronger program. Many of

the locations that we then had, for example, had fixed seats which meant very inflexible seating, to say the least. Thus, if you had a small group of 25 or 30 having a political discussion, all you could do was have your audience sitting in the first two rows of an amphitheater that held 250 seats. We took all the seats out of the America House in Cologne and others, for example, and created for better program space. Among other things, the libraries were all color-coded by specific thematic areas and there were other major changes during those whole four years. It was a period of great Sturm und Drang.

Q: Did these changes then survive into succeeding years?

RUSSELL: Many of them did; all of them not. Within a few years, the five German-American Institutes lost their American officers and locally hired American expatriates were brought in. But the fact that we created one national program, the fact that libraries became up-to-date resource centers, that informational and cultural programs were far better integrated...I think that a good deal more remained than was put back into old ways. It certainly had the effect of shaking things up and getting everybody to ask questions about what the best way of doing things was.

Q: What do you think were the special benefits of that change?

RUSSELL: I think that we had a great deal of more unified approach, a better focus on the issues that were most important to Germany and the United States. We looked at our posts as a single USIS rather than as individual entities with separate local perspectives, and there was a strong spell-out of policy issues and of the problems that needed to be addressed in the bilateral relationship that we sent from Bonn that had never been there before. And we built up the country post by bringing FSOs in from the individual posts to Bonn-for example, George Henry, a Branch PAO in Hamburg, was brought down to be head of the Program Division in Bonn, and his younger colleague, Tom O'Connor, who was head of the America House became Branch PAO and the head of the America House at the same time. So those years were full of changes and challenges. I was glad, frankly,

after two very intensive years in the Soviet Union and four years in Bonn to come back in 1975 to Washington.

I had a year off, as one of the three Agency officers in the State Department's Senior Seminar. The other two were Jay Gildner, the West European Area Director, and Carl, a Latin-America hand. Altogether, it was a good thing, a real break, and an excellent chance to get acquainted with this country. In those days one of the benefits of being in the senior seminar, which started in August and ended in June, was that in the springtime you could do a personal project of your own choosing, and there were funds available for overseas travel. At that time, I had never been to the Far East and I had never been to India or to the Near East. The theme that I came up with, wondering how I might tie these areas together, was to do a Senior Seminar thesis or report, on the impact of the Yom Kippur War on Japan, which was very heavily, and still is, dependent on the Near East petroleum supplies.

It was a kind of wild idea because it meant going to Japan for almost two weeks, interviewing people at the Ministry for International Trade and Industry (MITI), the American Embassy; and elsewhere. I went to the Saudi Arabian Embassy and had a long talk with the Ambassador in Tokyo and found out what the impact had been, and then flew from Tokyo to Saudi Arabia with a stop in India. An interesting sideline to the round-the-world travel in that period was that the United States had built such an enormous stock of surplus rupees in India that if you went around the world, you had to stop for a day in India so your tickets could be paid for in rupees. So, when I left Tokyo, I stopped in India, arrived at 4 a.m. in the morning and left at 3 a.m. the next morning. Never went to sleep and felt the full exposure to what you can see in 23 hours in Delhi, then flew on to Karachi and to Dhahran and spent 11 days in Saudi Arabia, 3 days in Kuwait.

I spent them interviewing those who were involved in the whole process of buying and shipping and managing the transfer of Middle East petroleum to Japan. Next, I wound up with 3 or 4 days in Paris at the International Energy Agency; then came back and

had a month to write the report. It was a lot of fun and a nice stretch. In the Senior Seminar period, there is still a possibility for individual research like this, but I hear that the opportunities are considerably less than what it used to be.

Q: What were the dates that you were in the senior seminar program?

RUSSELL: August 1975 until the end of May or early part of June 1976. In 1976, I moved to what was then called IMV, which was the Information Agency...("I" stood for information, "M" for motion pictures, and "V" for television). IMV at that time was the service providing the television and motion pictures for USIS. A political appointee named Robert Scott was the Director of the Service. I served as his Deputy for 8 or 9 months and then in the spring of 1977—he had been a holdover from the old Republican Administration—John Reinhardt, who was the Director of the Agency from '77 on, decided that it was time Bob Scott to leave. He made me the head of IMV, as Assistant Director for Motion Pictures and Television, which was the job that I held until the middle of 1978. So, for perhaps 15 months, I was in charge of IMV. That period was very interesting because television was really coming up very, very rapidly. It had begun to rise but the number of films that the Agency made was very surprisingly limited, and the films that they made were films that could be used for television. We did a number of things in-house, but we also brought in outside contractors to do specific jobs.

Q: These films that were made... Were they documentaries or...?

RUSSELL: They were not documentaries in the traditional sense. At that time, the service had already moved in the direction of doing series, so that the PAO in Kenya, for example, could say to Kenya Television, "I have this terrific thirteen part series which would give you a whole season." Several of us came up with this idea of a series of programs called Century III, pegged to the beginning of the third century of the United States, since 1976 was the year of the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

We had a very interesting time developing the policy approach to doing films about atomic power, education, agriculture, in each one looking at where the United States had been and where it was going, what the new trends were in each field. We made 13 half-hour films in the series called “Century III” and launched a series of films called “Reflections”. The idea there was to identify Americans of great distinction in their fields, in the autumn years of their lives and to do in-depth documentaries about their work.

The center piece was each one's own reflections about their lives, and so the series was called “Reflections.” Margaret Mead, with whom we did an intensive interview about her life, was the most distinguished woman anthropologist of the century. We also did a program on Leonard Bernstein and his work. These were hour-long documentary films of a very special nature. They were a lot like the contemporary program called, “Biography”, on the Arts and Entertainment Network. They were all Americans; they were all alive; and they could look back on their careers and judge what they had achieved.

The Director of the Agency at that time, John Reinhardt, did not give very strong support to television. He was much more interested in the exchanges field. I found myself fighting for budget and fighting to keep things alive. One thing we did that was worth particular mentioning was that for the first time in January 1977, USIA did a special program about the new Administration. Interviews with President Carter, with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Hamilton Jordan, 8 or 10 key people in the White House, all taped at the White House. We set up these interviews in the basement and recorded them, using an American journalist named Edward P. Morgan as the interviewer.

Somewhat later, President Carter made his first trip abroad to Brazil, Nigeria, India, and others—to five countries that were not Germany, Japan, Israel, not the places he would automatically be expected to go first. At the White House again, we did messages from President Carter to television audiences in these five countries for airing in advance of his visit. I still have the teleprompter text of what President Carter said to the people of Brazil.I could not then foresee that Brazil would soon figure in my personal and professional

life. Lyle Copmann, a very fine USIA officer who was PAO in Brazil, died suddenly in early 1978 of a heart attack. For some reason it was very difficult and proved impossible for Director Reinhardt at that time to find the right person to replace him among our colleagues who were Latin America hands. Various people said they couldn't learn Portuguese or they were tired. For whatever reasons the logical people who should have taken the Brazil program all declined one way or the other.

Thereupon John Reinhardt decided in the spring of '78 that the next PAO in Brazil was going to be yours truly, and he announced that to me at some time like April or May. I said, “Well, John, I have just been running television now for more than a year. I like it here. My daughter is a junior in high school and it's not the time for us to go abroad again.” Director Reinhardt had very strong views about assignments, and he was particularly eager to show that despite the fact that he was the only Agency Director who had been an Agency officer, that he was going to be tougher...so tough on personnel matters that no one could accuse him of being soft on old friends. Several people whom he wanted to assign to various posts abroad really had very strong reasons for not wanting to go at that time, and at least two outstanding Agency officers resigned from the Agency rather than accept the assignment that was being insisted upon by the Director. I said I would rather not go to Brazil at this time. I didn't know any Portuguese; I only had a little bit of college Spanish. He was very insistent, and in June he said, “I insist that you be our...that you take over the Brazil program.” So I did...

My family thought seriously at the time about perhaps remaining here in Washington. We had bought a larger house in '73, and when we came back from Bonn in '75, we had fixed it up to the point where we were quite satisfied. We had been living in it for a while and were not ready to go abroad again after just three years here. It was the call of duty, though, and the challenge of a whole new part of the world. Finally, I was very glad that my family decided that they would indeed come with me to Brasilia. Our older boy had already gone to college but our daughter spent her last year of high school at a school in Brasilia, and our younger boy went through four years of high school in Brasilia. It was

quite a good school, one-third Americans, one-third Brazilians and one-third of various other nationalities, and it was a good experience.

Q: My children all went to high school in the American School in Japan, except for our final year in Tokyo when the U.S. Government required that the children attend the U.S. Army School.

RUSSELL: Living in Brasilia at that time was not much fun. It had been in existence at that time for 18 years, but it hadn't worked out terribly well as a city, being so far away from the centers of activity and commerce. They even used to say that the only three categories of people that you met in Brasilia were diplomats, journalists and Congressmen. No artists, no poets, no businessmen. It was a rather artificial kind of place. However, in professional terms, the assignment was a very interesting one. We still had at that time a $10 million program in Brazil, and a very large staff. We had a publishing staff in Rio of 25 Brazilians; we had 4 Americans in Sao Paulo, 4 in Rio, and we had USIS posts in the 3 large cities, that is to say, Brasilia, which was not a large city but the capital; Rio and Sao Paulo, and in 4 other cities as well. We had USIS posts from south to north in Porto Alegre near the Uruguayan border; in Salvador de Bahia, on the coast north of Rio, in Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais, an important wealthy province in the central part of the country, and up on the northeast coast in Recife. And there were Americans and locals in all seven posts.

We arrived there in October 1978, and stayed the full four-year tour until the middle of 1982. Some of the problems that existed in the German program obtained in Brazil too. A lot of branches and the challenges of maintaining a central focus and a centrally run program. The problem was the great distances. West Germany is only as big as Oregon but Brazil is bigger than the United States without Alaska. I found that there was a very real need to bring the staff that were so widely scattered together to get a better sense of itself.

Soon after I arrived, I started a magazine, a monthly sort of a newsletter, for USIS only. This was the time we were called USICA during those four years, and we called this “Communicando” with ICA capitalized in the middle. The Brazilians are garrulous, outgoing , convivial people, and there were all kinds of stories about individual families and all the birthdays of everybody in the 8 posts, crossword puzzles and jokes, and accounts of successful programs. It was a lot of fun to do. One of the locals in Brasilia was the editor of it. I wrote something for it every month. It was a good thing to do and when we left, one of the best mementos we came away with was that the staff had all the copies of “Communicando” bound in book form. I still have it and still admire it. There are cartoons and drawings and all kinds of lively stuff that helped hold the post together. But as usual, your successors can come in and undo some of your best ideas. Within a month after I left and my successor came, he decided it was “too labor-intensive, too much time was spent. We don't need it.” So he closed it down.

Q: What were your particular goals and results at that time? What were your major efforts in getting the program started?

RUSSELL: The country had been under military dictatorship for more than a decade when we arrived. Since 1964, there had been a series of generals running the country, and there was still a general named Figueredo in charge of the country. He was somewhat less of an autocrat and wanted very much to return things to democracy and worked fairly steadily towards it. One of our principal problems as USIS was to help encourage that, to project to Brazilians a real sense of how pluralistic democracy works, and keep their sense of the need to support it alive. It was less adventurous when I was PAO than it had been in earlier times. John Mowinckel whom I mentioned earlier, had been PAO in the late '60s-early '70s and he took a lot of chances with dissidents, maintained contacts with people who were on the political outs, and took a lot of chances. He was still based in Rio during his tour.

The problem of organizing our program in such a way that it was run centrally from the capital was similar to the situation in the German program, as I mentioned. We found that running effective programs required that we develop a very intense network of communication. We made a great deal of use at that time of the telex, in the same way that E-mail is now the communication means of choice of most posts. We sent from the capital by telex an overview of what was happening throughout the country in a given week. This went to all of the Branch posts early in the week and they fed back to us what was going on at their posts. It often worked out that Americans who were in the country as Fulbright professors or as visitors for some other reason, by tightening the connection among the eight posts., could be programmed elsewhere in the country. For example, the novelist, E.L. Doctorow was in Rio to present a new book of his. When we knew he was there, we were able to arrange for him to come up also to the Brazilian capital and perhaps to go to Sao Paulo as well, for a lecture series.

Those, I think, were among the principal goals, pulling the 8 posts together so that they cohered. Previously there had been little such cohesion. The PAO in Recife was perfectly happy to do things on his own and had hardly any reporting obligations back to Brasilia. The way I set it up, the Deputy PAO was the supervisor of the branches; I was the supervisor of the Deputy, the CAO and the IO and the Exec. In this way the Deputy PAO was a clearing point of what was going on, and he visited all of the branches at least twice a year. He saw what kind of programs were going on, so that the Branch PAOs had a sense that they were really working in a common cause, that they weren't just doing what they felt like doing. Some of the Branch PAOs in Brazil had distinctly weak officers. They didn't last a long time. There was a very weak officer in Porto Alegre who, after a year of non-performance, was eased out. At least once a year, we had a PAO conference where everybody came together. We didn't do it in the capital every year. We did in Brasilia one year, and in Rio, one year, then in Brasilia and then in Sao Paulo. It was extremely important for the PAO of Recife, for example, who otherwise would never even see Sao Paulo, to gain a sense of the country's major city.

Life in Brazil was a distinct change from Germany, our previous post. As strictly protocol-conscious as the Germans were, they were always on time. If they said they would come, they would come. Brazilians would say they would come, and either not come at all or come an hour late, or come themselves and their wives and come with their four cousins who were visiting them. We learned to be very flexible, and we learned also to enjoy and to give noisy parties. The Brazilians like a special kind of meal that they served called feijoada. We learned how to do that, how to prepare and enjoy it.

I had hoped to go to London from Brasilia and had put in a bid for it. Someone else had put in a bid earlier and had gotten a prior commitment from the Director that if he went to a post where he absolutely didn't want to go, he could go to London thereafter. So we did not go to London, and we did indeed, instead, go to Spain for 3 years and ran the program there from '82 to '85. Here again, it was a question of having a crash course in the language as we had had to do for Portuguese. Spanish was easier to learn because I knew Portuguese very thoroughly after the four years. I remember scoring 4+ in Portuguese and then immediately proceeded to forget it. When you plunge into a new thing and are concentrating all day, every day on learning Spanish, the similar language begins to fade. After learning Spanish, I ran into the man who had tested me in Portuguese 6 weeks before, and I was barely able to say hello. Very embarrassing.

The tour in Spain began at a time when Spain had been rid of the Franco dictatorship only 7 years, and various forms of democracy were taking shape. It was a very interesting time to be there. The whole society, from '36/'37 when Franco won the civil war until '75, had been in effect a closed autocratic dictatorship. A lot less severe than the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany, but one nevertheless.

We had a very lively program in Spain. A lot was going on. A principal effort there was to get a really effective cultural center in place. We had a small library out of the way, dark, and fairly miserable when I got there. One of the early things I set my sights on achieving was to create a really state-of-the art cultural center. It took about almost two years, but

we did do it and it has been extremely active and successful ever since. Right downtown, right around the corner from the Parliament, we had set it up so as to be a major source of information about legislation, about legislative procedures, about judicial activities in this country. It was a really very political move that the Cultural Center was opened in downtown Madrid.

As always, in Agency matters, it's terribly important that we know what is going on back in Washington and that funding is sought when timing is right. We were able to get, I recall, in the German program $280,000 for a major renovation of the America House in Hamburg on the last day before the fiscal year ended, because last-minute funds became available and we had already an approved plan in place to spend it.

When I got to Madrid, there was an operation in Barcelona, a Branch PAO office in Barcelona, rather small and not extremely active. There was nothing in the south and there was nothing in the north, and we were able to open branches, one in Seville and one in Bilbao, during my time there. They were headed by foreign nationals, and did very good work in public affairs outreach. The exchange program was extremely important. When I arrived, the level of funding that we had for IVs, the International Visitors program in Spain, was only enough to send 18 a year, and we felt a need to persuade Washington that that was not nearly enough. We needed, given the fact that Spain had had this long, long period of authoritarian rule and was now building a democracy and new parties, to have a substantial number of IVs. We managed to increase the IV budget during the first year I was there from 18 to 55, and we sent many politicians, journalists, and others from Spain for the kind of intensive exposure in the United States on the IV program. Fulbright was also very important, and the Fulbright Commission became a vigorous, very well-funded bilateral effort. There were as many Americans as were the Spaniards on it. There were funds for Fulbright as part of the military bases deal with Spain.An unusual law in Spain requires banks to reserve some 5% of their profits for cultural affairs. We were able to make a lot of use of those cultural centers attached to banks as places where we could have performing arts, poetry readings, concerts by U.S. artists. At the same time,

we persuaded a number of banks to contribute to the Fulbright fund. The wealthy Banco de Bilbao, regularly every year, gave a million dollars in support of the Fulbright program. The total exchanges budget between the United States and the Spanish Government and private Spanish sources, as I recall, was between $10 and $12 million a year. And we helped it grow and it was very important because it brought in American teachers into Spain, and it got Spanish academics out to this country. I think that the USIS effort in Spain during the early '80s was one of the really important contributory elements to the anchoring of democracy in Spain.

We had planned to stay there until '86. In December of '84, however, I saw that China was going to open up, and my wife and I decided that was something that we really would be very excited to do. So I applied for the PAO job in China in January of 1985. There was some back and forth, because I had had no Asian experience except the senior seminar trip. I had to agree to spend two years to learn Chinese before going, but eventually, the Area Director at that time, Jodie Lewinsohn, said “China is important and here is a guy who has run Brazil and Germany, and who is crazy enough to say he will learn Chinese. Let's go for it.” So, we came back here in the spring of '85, after three years in Spain, spent a year studying Chinese here, a year studying Chinese in Taiwan, and I became PAO to Beijing in the summer of '87, then spent almost four years—that was my last post overseas—as PAO in Beijing.

Q: How did you find Beijing at that time? Was it still pretty closed, or...?

RUSSELL: It was closed, but it was open in a lot of interesting ways.There was always in existence a Fulbright program under which the Chinese accepted 25 American professors to teach in their universities. Also, there were a lot of academic interchanges between China and the United States. The Chinese had at that time about 20,000 students studying here. Unlike the Soviet Union, the Chinese had always felt that they gained more for letting their young people study here. After the end of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-'60s, there was a big explosion in travel abroad by Chinese students. The Chinese diaspora is

very important, you know. If you're Chinese living in San Francisco and your grandnephew is a bright kid of 18 or 19 who wants to come to study in California, you come up with the money and he can get an exit visa, and can go abroad to study. The academic side of things was quite important.

The notion of being able to have real outreach in China was steadily growing. Until the crackdown in June 1989, the Chinese Government had been more and more open to expanding relationships with the United States. It was quite surprising. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, for example, invited me to give a series of talks about the American elections which were coming in the fall of 1988. It looked as if we were going to be able to open cultural centers, and sure enough, we were able to open the first one in Guangzhou (Canton) in the south, about a year after I arrived. I made several trips down there to find and negotiate for a location, because it seemed to us exceedingly important in China that there be access in the major cities to American books and ideas, films and television, and speakers, and so on. During the time that I was there, we opened up a cultural center in Guangzhou and one in Shanghai for the first time, and we were set for the opening in Beijing about 6 months after I left.

The China years were very sharply marked by the events at Tiananmen Square because many hopeful things fell apart in its wake. The day before the students started marching, the Ambassador had signed the agreement to bring the Peace Corps to China, on April 14, 1989, and the students started marching on April 15. For the next 6 weeks, it got bigger and bigger by the day. I used to go most days, afternoon or evening, down to the Square to talk and to listen and to find out what was happening.

In the middle of May took place the most interesting political time in my career, because Gorbachev came to make party peace with the Chinese on May 15. He was in meetings with the Chinese at the same time that the demonstrations and the excitement grew bigger and louder and louder and bigger. You had this double story going on at the same time, and Gorbachev had brought with him a tremendous journalist corps. Hundreds of people

came with him and once they were there, they didn't leave because of the unfolding story of pro-democracy demonstrations. We were very, very much involved in that, in organizing briefings for journalists when the crackdown came. There was a period of 4 or 5 days when the Ambassador and I were there, practically the whole time, exposed to the press, dealing with the students, getting Americans out of the country, arranging for the families to leave. It was a very intense time.

Once that had passed, in the fall of '89 and in the fall of '90, I had two very interesting experiences because I could spend more time outside China because so many of our programs had stopped short or cut back. There was no Fulbright program, for example, for a whole year. My wife and I made a very interesting foray into Mongolia in the fall of 1989. We went for a week by train from Beijing. 42 hours. It was a marvelous trip. I had set the task of finding out what a future USIS in Mongolia would look like. I did an analysis of the university, the cultural scene, the media. I found it interesting and it was helpful when shortly thereafter democracy did come to Mongolia and so did a U.S. Embassy and a USIS. We have PAO there now who is very active. Back then, it was a great fun to be the first officer to go and talk to people to find out what opportunities there would be for us when it did open.

Q: Did you find in Mongolia considerably greater openness than there was in China itself?

RUSSELL: Oh, yes! It was already changing rapidly and in December of that year, for reasons that I don't recall exactly now, there was a kind of backing away from power on the part of the communist party that had been in charge. Great pressure was brought up for changes and they happened very rapidly. The following fall, 1990, we made a similar trip to Tibet to assess the prospects for USIS activities there. Those two fall trips were extremely interesting for both of us, especially since my wife and I could make them together.

Q: Did you get any reaction from the Chinese on your Tibet effort?

RUSSELL: They were very careful but not overtly suspicious. We had to get clearances from fairly high up, I assume, and I had to be careful about who I talked to. As a result of it, the trip we were able to set things up so that we were from time to time able to send speakers and others into Tibet. In China, at the time that I was there, we had 4 branch posts, Chengdu in the far west on the way to Tibet, Guangzhou or Canton in the south, Shanghai on the eastern coast, and Shenyang (which used to be called Mukden when we were kids) up in Manchuria. We had Americans in charge in all four places.

Q: I went to Mukden when young, in 1938.

RUSSELL: It's still an interesting place. I am sorry I never got farther north. I made 3 or 4 trips to Shenyang, but I didn't get up closer to the border. In any case, early in 1991, I had an urgent call from Gene Kopp. My tour was going to end that summer, and he said that he wanted me very much to come back and take over as Counselor of the Agency. Mike Pistor, at that time, had been on the job for 2 years, and was in line for an Ambassadorial post in Africa. He had been offered and he wanted to take on Malawi. So we left China a little early, probably 3 months in advance, in March of 1991, and I came back and took over as...

Q: Who was the Ambassador in China?

M..R.Very interesting and contrasting individuals. The first two years it was Winston Lord and the second 2 years it was James Lilley. In any case back in Washington, the situation as Counselor was a complex one because Henry Catto had only recently come on board, and there had been a lot of tension between the previous Director, Bruce Gelb, and Deputy Director Kopp. The two plus years that I spent in the Counselor's office were years full of activities. None of the issues that have troubled the Agency since then about its continued existence or its funding had yet arisen. There was a great deal of interest in opening up USIA in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. I made several trips for Director Catto in 1992, and again in '93. This was the first time I was back to Russia

and other parts in all those years. I did several of the initial negotiations about opening American cultural centers in St Petersburg, in Kazakhstan and in Kiev.

Working with Gene Kopp and Henry Catto was a great joy. Both of them were excellent leaders, very different in their styles but very committed to the Agency and its role, very much aware of the importance, the vital roles played by the foreign service, enjoying very close and cordial relations with the White House and with the Department of State. When Henry Catto was sworn in as Director of the Agency in May of 1991, he was sworn in by the President Bush personally...actually, I am wrong. President Bush was present at the swearing in; he was sworn in by the Supreme Court Justice Kennedy. Those were extremely energetic and interesting years.I found that the political leadership of the Agency at that time, Paula Dobriansky at the head of the P-Bureau, and Bill Glade heading the E-Bureau...I am not sure...I draw a blank about who was the head of VOA at the time... In any case, there was a high degree of cohesion between the political leadership of the Agency and its career elements. I look back on that period as a very positive time. We had strong Area Directors; there was a clear sense that the Counselor was the senior career officer, and what he had to say was listened to and he could affect funding decisions in a meaningful way among the Areas. It was probably fairly sure that within a few months after Henry Catto's departure, after the election of 1992, that the times would change and that the new Director and the new Deputy Director would want their own Counselor. So I was fairly prepared, in the spring of 1993, for a change and felt very fortunate that the ideal final assignment was in sight.

I applied for and got the diplomatic resident posting at the Fletcher School. I left Washington and the Agency in June of 1993, just before I turned 64, spending the last year teaching up at the Fletcher School and finished teaching in May of 1994, turned 65 on May 28, 1994, retired on May 31, with the feeling that those 33 plus years that I had spent with the Agency had been extremely gratifying and nearly always productive. It was not always easy, and my wife, Stella in particular, deserves tremendous credit for putting up with 25 or 30 moves during all those years, and the great demands that were placed on

her throughout, but especially during the early part of our tenure up until 1975 or so. The funds available for representation were very limited then.

Q: Yes, they were...

RUSSELL: ...and during the 4 years that I was in Bonn, I was regularly out of pocket, a thousand or more dollars a year. Then something happened in the late '70s and it became a good deal easier, but it still meant that the burden on the wife...the burden was always a serious one, a very constant one: the constant moves, the readjustments and often having to put together a dinner for 20 people on short notice. I look on my own time overall in the Agency as one where I was fortunate in the postings that I got. I was fortunate in the people that I worked with and for, I was fortunate that things had such a great variety of different cultural and linguistic and political environments to work in. I have nothing but appreciation for the assignments. Some of them I was not ready for—I didn't want to go to Brazil in 1978 at all, for example, but I think I made, ultimately, the right decision by saying, “Yes, I would go” but I don't believe the series of challenges...met and successfully met...that I could possibly have worked it all if I haven't had Stella's support.

Q: You had a very wide spread of experiences, probably wider than almost anybody else that I know of.

RUSSELL: The thing I miss about my Agency experience is that I was never an Area Director.

It was just that an interesting post kept coming along. So I have no real regrets...

Q: You probably stirred more things up in the respective posts to which you went than you would have as an Area Director.

RUSSELL: Maybe. I will say that I have always felt more comfortable in USIA than I think I would have felt with the Department of State.

Q: I think you probably were much freer and happier in USIA than you would have been going into the State Department.

RUSSELL: That probably wraps it up, I think. I feel a lot of dismay over the current trends within the Agency because I still really believe that the synergy of information, press and education, exchange, and cultural exchange create something that is very powerful that can have real influence over the years. Anything that we are able to do to keep that function integral is something that I think very much worth striving for.

Q: I think so too, and I am very worried about it because I think what's going to or what it might happen is distressing. Yesterday, I went to the Foreign Service Day. A speaker...a very young fellow...

RUSSELL: Pat Kennedy? Pat Kennedy is the Acting Head of Management. He is supposed to pull this together... Or Nicholas Burns?

Q: A young fellow with a moustache.

RUSSELL: That would be Nicholas Burns...

Q: Anyway, he started talking about how glad they are going to be to get USIA back in to State and are probably going to put the Information side into such and such Bureau, and put another part into the Cultural Bureau. I finally got up and said, "I hope that when USIA is brought back, you will not separate them because it is necessary to keep these units together. USIA has spent over 40 years melding these sections together, getting them to operate as a complete entity. The minute you break them apart and put them into different units, you are going to diminish the impact that they have, and damage the contribution that they can make." But clearly, in Burns' thinking, they will be splitting them in at least three ways.

End of interview